

## Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

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EXDIS

FOL REPEAT OF TUNIS 1407 TO SECSTATE INFO ALGIERS RABAT AMMAN  
BEIRUT CAIRO DAMASCUS JIDDA TEL AVIV FEB 28

QTE:

S E C R E T TUNIS 1407

EXDIS

FROM ATHERTON

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: OVIP (ATHERTON, ALFRED L., JR.)

SUBJECT: ATHERTON VISIT TO TUNISIA

1. IN MEETINGS AMBASSADOR SEELYE AND I HAVE EVENING  
FEB 26 AND DURING DAY FEB 27 WITH PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA,  
PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA, FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTI AND  
OTHER TUNISIAN OFFICIALS, I PUT THIS VISIT TO MAGREB  
CAPITALS IN CONTEXT OF OUR PERIODIC CONSULTATIONS WITH  
GOVERNMENTS OF TUNISIA, ALGERIA AND MOROCCO, EXPLAINING  
THAT TIMING WAS KEYED TO LONG-PLANNED ECONOMIC TALKS  
IN ALGERIA BY UNDER SECRETARY ROBINSON WHOM I WOULD  
BE JOINING THERE FEB 28. I EMPHASIZED THAT  
SECRETARY THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE GOOD OCCASION FOR

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EXCHANGE OF VIEWS IN TUNIS, ALGIERS AND RABAT ON

BILATERAL RELATIONS AND ON REGIONAL ISSUES OF  
COMMON CONCERN, IN PARTICULAR ARAB-ISRAELI QUESTION  
AND SAHARA DISPUTE.

2. AS ALWAYS I FOUND TUNISIANS--IN PARTICULAR  
FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTI--ASTUTE AND REALISTIC OBSERVERS  
OF REGIONAL SCENE, DISPASSIONATE, RELATIVELY OBJECTIVE,  
SEEKING TO REMAIN ON SIDELINES BUT OBVIOUSLY CONCERNED  
THAT THEY WILL BE ENGULFED IN EVENTS BEYOND THEIR  
CONTROL. FOLLOWING IS SUMMARY OF PRINCIPAL SUBJECTS COVERED,  
BASED LARGELY ON MEETINGS WITH CHATTI WITH WHOM I  
HAD MOST IN-DEPTH DISCUSSIONS BUT WHOSE VIEWS WERE  
GENERALLY REFLECTED IN CONVERSATIONS WITH OTHERS AS  
WELL.

3. MIDDLE EAST - I STRESSED THAT WE DO NOT ACCEPT  
IDEA THAT SITUATION CAN STAND STILL THROUGH 1976.  
WE RECOGNIZE STALEMATE CAN ONLY LEAD TO POLITICAL  
DETERIORATION HARMFUL TO OUR OWN NATIONAL INTERESTS.  
SETTLEMENT CANNOT BE ACHIEVED IN ONE YEAR AND IT  
WOULD BE UNREALISTIC TO EXPECT DRAMATIC BREAKTHROUGHS  
IN 1976, BUT THERE MUST BE SOME MOVEMENT AND SOME  
LAYING OF GROUNDWORK FOR FUTURE PROGRESS. WE HAD  
IMPRESSED ON PRIME MINISTER RABIN DURING HIS  
RECENT VISIT TO WASHINGTON THAT EARLY NEGOTIATING  
ACTIVITY IS NECESSARY AND HAD REVIEWED VARIOUS OPTIONS WE  
SAW -- FURTHER TERRITORIAL STEPS ON ONE OR MORE FRONTS,  
GENEVA PREPARATORY MEETING, MOVE TO GENEVA CONFERENCE  
(WHICH, HOWEVER, WOULD REQUIRE BRIDGING LARGE EXISTING  
GAP ON PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATION ISSUE). WE BELIEVE  
THERE IS GROWING SUPPORT IN U.S. OPINION FOR VIEW  
THAT STAGNATION CANNOT BE RISKED, AND HAVE IMPRESSION  
WE HAVE HELPED STIMULATE SERIOUS DEBATE IN ISRAEL  
ABOUT ISSUES OF A SETTLEMENT INCLUDING PALESTINIAN ISSUE.  
WE EXPECT FURTHER EXCHANGES WITH ISRAELIS AND  
WILL ALSO BE CONSULTING WITH EGYPT, SYRIA AND  
JORDAN THROUGH OUR AMBASSADORS, WHO WILL BE RE-  
TURNING TO WASHINGTON FOR DETAILED DISCUSSIONS  
PREPARATORY TO SEEKING VIEWS OF THEIR HOST GOVERN-  
MENTS ABOUT POSSIBLE WAYS TO PROCEED. ONLY AFTER  
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THIS ROUND OF CONSULTATIONS IS COMPLETED WILL WE BE  
IN POSITION TO BEGIN TO DRAW CONCLUSIONS ABOUT WHAT  
MAY BE MOST PRACTICAL COURSE TO REVIVE NEGOTIATING  
PROCESS. WHILE CONVEYING TO ISRAEL OUR SENSE OF  
URGENCY, WE ALSO WANTED TO COUNSEL PATIENCE TO  
ARABS. IF THEY LOOK TO U.S. TO PRODUCE PROGRESS, THEY  
SHOULD ALSO UNDERSTAND WE MUST BE THE JUDGE OF HOW  
RAPIDLY AND IN WHAT DIRECTION IT IS POSSIBLE TO MOVE.

RASH STATEMENTS AND ACTIONS, SUCH AS MOVE TO EXPEL ISRAEL FROM UN, WOULD REVERSE FAVORABLE TRENDS OF PAST TWO YEARS. AS FOR ARAB VIEW THAT PLO SHOULD BE ADMITTED TO NEGOTIATING PROCESS, MAJOR OBSTACLE IS PLO POSITION ON QUESTION OF EXISTENCE OF ISRAEL.

4. TUNISIAN RESPONSE TO FOREGOING PRESENTATION WAS BASICALLY SYMPATHETIC BUT SKEPTICAL. CHATTI STRESSED WHAT WAS PROBABLY KEY POINT TO COME OUT OF MY TALKS HERE: ARAB SUMMIT CONFERENCE IS SCHEDULED FOR APRIL 19, AND DECISIONS TAKEN THERE WILL SET ARAB POLICY FOR ENSUING PERIOD, INCLUDING POLICY TOWARD RENEWAL OF UNDOF MAY 30, JUST AS 1974 RABAT SUMMIT HAD SET POLICY THEREAFTER ON PALESTINIAN QUESTION. IN 1974, CHATTI SAID, IF HUSSEIN HAD BEEN ABLE TO SAY HE COULD DELIVER RETURN OF SUBSTANTIAL PARTS OF WEST BANK, SUMMIT WOULD HAVE GIVEN HIM A CHANCE INSTEAD OF GIVING MANDATE TO PLO. IF MODERATES CAN CREDIBLY SAY IN APRIL 1976 THAT THEY HAVE PROSPECTS FOR RECOVERY OF OCCUPIED TERRITORY, THEY CAN CARRY THE DAY. EVEN HUSSEIN MIGHT BE GIVEN NEW MANDATE, WITH UNDERSTANDING THAT HE WAS NEGOTIATING FOR WEST BANK ON BEHALF OF PALESTINIANS.

5. CHATTI HAD NOTED PUBLIC SPECULATION IN ISRAEL ABOUT NEGOTIATIONS LOOKING TOWARD END OF BELLIGERENCY (WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS "VERY DIFFERENT FROM FINAL PEACE") AND SADAT INTERVIEW SAYING EGYPT PREPARED TO NEGOTIATE END OF BELLIGERENCY IN RETURN FOR ALL OCCUPIED TERRITORY. HE THOUGHT THIS PUBLIC EXCHANGE SIGNIFICANT, PERHAPS SIGNALLING DIRECTION IN WHICH WE WERE WORKING. I SAID WE WERE STILL DISCUSSING ALL OPTIONS WITH PARTIES AND HAD DRAWN  
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NO CONCLUSIONS OF OUR OWN.

6. CHATTI'S RESPONSE IN ESSENCE WAS THAT WE SHOULD DRAW CONCLUSIONS AND MAKE THEM KNOWN BEFORE APRIL 19 ARAB SUMMIT OR MODERATE LEADERS (SADAT, HUSSEIN, ASAD, PLO "WHICH WOULD HAVE ACCEPTED LAST SC RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING ISRAEL IF U.S. HAD NOT VETOED") WILL FIND TIDE TURNING AGAINST THEM. IN THIS CONNECTION HE EXPRESSED PARTICULAR CONCERN RE SAUDI ARABIA, WHICH IS NOT AS STRONG AS UNDER KING FAISAL, AND ALGERIA, WHICH UNDER PRESSURE OF SAHARA SITUATION MAY MOVE TOWARD REJECTIONIST FRONT (-IF IRAQ JOINS LIBYA IN SUPPORTING ALGERIA ON SAHARA, BOUMEDIENE WILL ABANDON HIS WAIT-AND-SEE ATTITUDE TOWARD U.S. PEACE EFFORTS").

7. SAHARA - TUNISIAN SYMPATHIES ARE CLEARLY WITH MOROCCO, AND THEY ARE WORRIED ABOUT IMPLICATIONS FOR THEM OF RAPPROACHEMENT BETWEEN ALGERIA AND LIBYA. THEY BELIEVE BOUMEDIENE HAS BOXED HIMSELF IN ON SELF-DETERMINATION ISSUE AND THAT HIS STRATEGY IS, FIRST, TO ESTABLISH LEGAL CASE THAT MOROCCAN-MAURITANIAN TAKEOVER OF SAHARA IS NEITHER LEGITIMIZED NOR FINAL AND, SECOND, TO KEEP POT BOILING THROUGH SPONSORSHIP OF POLISARIO GUERILLA WARFARE. THEY DO NOT EXPECT DIRECT MOROCCAN-ALGERIAN WAR. NEITHER, HOWEVER, DO THEY EXPECT EARLY RESOLUTION OF DISPUTE. THEY POINT IN PARTICULAR TO ALGERIAN MOVE AT CURRENT OAU FON MIN MEETING IN ADDIS ABABA TO RECOGNIZE POLISARIO AS NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT--A MOVE THEY BELIEVE WILL SUCCEED UNLESS VOTE CAN BE POSTPONED AND, IF IT SUCCEEDS, WILL LEAD MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA TO QUIT OAU. TUNISIANS HOLD OUT NO HOPE FOR ARAB GOVERNMENT OR ARAB LEAGUE MEDIATION EFFORTS. WHILE MAJORITY OF ARABS SUPPORT MOROCCO, MAJORITY OF AFRICANS SUPPORT ALGERIA, AND CONSEQUENTLY BOUMEDIENE WILL RESIST SOLUTIONS PROPOSED BY FORMER, AS WILL HASSAN BY LATTER.

8. TUNISIANS SEE AS GREATEST DANGER THAT BOUMEDIENE WILL TAKE STEPS TO INTERNATIONALIZE SAHARA CONFLICT,  
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AND AS ONLY HOPE THAT USG WILL MAKE CLEAR TO SOVIETS --"AS IT FAILED TO DO IN ANGOLA"--THAT IT WILL NOT PERMIT THIS TO HAPPEN.

9. SO FAR AS PROSPECTS FOR MEDIATION ARE CONCERNED, TUNISIANS SEE NONE AT PRESENT. THEY FULLY AGREE THAT USG SHOULD NOT RPT NOT UNDERTAKE SUCH EFFORTS AND THAT OUR BEST COURSE IS TO SEEK TO PERSUADE BOUMEDIENE THAT HIS INTERESTS LIE IN PRESERVING US-ALGERIAN ECONOMIC/COMMERCIAL TIES AND NOT RPT NOT IN MAKING SAHARA ISSUE THE TOUCHSTONE OF US-ALGERIAN RELATIONS.

10. I STRESSED TO TUNISIANS THAT THIS WAS PRECISELY OUR APPROACH. OUR POLICY IS BASED ON LONG-STANDING, BROAD-BASED RELATIONS WITH MOROCCO AND, CONSISTENT WITH THIS APPROACH, WE WILL CONTINUE OUR MILITARY SUPPLY PROGRAM. AT SAME TIME, WE WANT TO PROTECT OUR INTERESTS IN GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALGERIA, BUT NOT AT EXPENSE OF US-MOROCCAN RELATIONS. I PARTICULARLY EMPHASIZED THAT MY TALKS IN ALGIERS AND RABAT, INSOFAR AS THEY DEALT WITH SAHARA ISSUE,

WOULD NOT SEEK A U.S. MEDIATORY ROLE BUT WOULD BE  
IN CONTEXT OF HOW THAT ISSUE IMPACTED ON BILATERAL  
US-ALGERIAN AND US-MOROCCAN RELATIONS.

11. BILATERAL RELATIONS - PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA MADE  
VERY LOW-KEY PITCH FOR MORE U.S. SUPPORT IN LIGHT OF  
NEW SITUATION IN NORTH AFRICA. I RESPONDED BY  
COMMENDING HIS WISDOM IN BASING TUNISIAN  
SECURITY, NOT ON BUILDING UP MILITARY FORCES BUT ON  
RELYING UPON HIS COUNTRY'S POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC  
VIABILITY AND ON THE SUPPORT OF HIS FRIENDS. IN  
THIS CONTEXT AND IN LIGHT OF DIMINISHING U.S.  
RESOURCES TO PROVIDE MATERIAL ASSISTANCE, I SAID WE  
WOULD CONTINUE TO DO ALL WE COULD TO DEMONSTRATE  
OUR TRADITIONAL FRIENDSHIP FOR TUNISIA AND OUR  
APPRECIATION OF ITS FRIENDSHIP OF US.

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